The Maharshi

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Reflections and Conversations

By Maurice Frydman

The religion of the West is based on faith. Faith is the supreme virtue, the very foundation of our religious life. When the mind cannot accept, faith is invoked and we swallow the pill of a dogma. Naturally the pill does not get assimilated and lies like a stone in our mental stomach with the result that our religious life is starved.

Mysticism, the personal contact with the Divine which is the natural flowering of all religious life, is almost entirely unknown to the masses in the West. It is practiced in convents and monasteries, but their influence on the religious attitude of the masses is small.

All verification by personal experience of religious dogmas is postponed till after death. But it is not in the nature of man to take his death seriously, the less his problematic postmortem experiences.

When a Westerner comes to India what strikes him is the businesslike matter-of-fact way in which all religious life is taken here. In India God counts. Divinity is taken into consideration in the everyday life of everybody. All religious statements can be verified by personal experience. In India the belief in God is as firm as our belief in the trans-Atlantic steamboat service, because everybody knows that it can be verified by him who makes the necessary effort.

The other thing that strikes the Westerner in India is the vastness of the religious outlook. Vistas which are opened before his eyes, the peaks of thought on which he is taken, create in him a state of deep astonishment. A new world is opened before him, a world full of interest, full of the most enticing adventures of undreamt possibilities of personal experience. Not the least reason for his astonishment is the possibility of meeting and conversing with people who have climbed the summits of religious life and have direct experience of the Divine.

It was the immense privilege of the writer to meet with a few of such men, but nobody has produced on him a deeper impression than Sri Ramana Maharshi. Meeting him was a turning point in his life. The sublime majesty of the Divine Life stood and moved before him in all its infinite simplicity. The Ultimate had revealed itself as the Immediate. The Supreme had become the Innermost. The undreamt of had become the Actual. The struggle for life was transformed into the Bliss of Life.

The writer must stop here. The actual experience is beyond his power of expression. There are those things which fully deserve the highest praise, the praise of silence.

M. F.: *Narada Bhakti Sutras* say that the path of devotion is best, as all paths lead to devotion. Cannot the same be said of *jnana* or yoga or *nishkama karma*?

M.: Why this differentiation? *Jnana* is *bhakti*; *vairagya* is *jnana*.

M. F.: To know is to love. If we love, we know more, and vice versa.

M.: Yes.

M. F.: *Ashtavakra Gita*, Chapter IX, verse 4 says: "Things come by themselves." Does anything come of itself without the operation of some cause behind it?

M.: That which comes to a man without present effort or desire is the result of past efforts or desires — *prarabdha karma*. Even a *jnani* who has no desires has to meet such events, as they are the result of his *prarabdha karma*.

Some one: "*Jnana* burns away all *karma,*" says the *Bhagavad Gita*; so the *jnani's jnana* could not leave *prarabdha* unburned. Is that so?

M.: In the *jnani's* view all *karma* has gone. But in the world's view, the *jnani's* body is seen subject to some *karma* and this is attributed to *prarabdha*.

M. F.: The *Ashtavakra Gita* says, "The *jnani* does not remember what he has done or not done." How to understand this?

M.: He is in *Brahman*, so he does not feel that he is the agent who has acted or not acted.

M. F.: If the *jnani* is subject to *prarabdha*, he may have to face desires, which are also a part of *prarabdha karma*. Desires cloud *jnana*. How can he then be a *jnani*?

M.: The desires that float before the *jnani* do not affect his *jnana*.

M. F.: The *Puranas* say that *jnanis* warred against *jnanis*. That must be due to *prarabdha* then?

M.: Yes. Krishna fought against Bhishma.

M. F.: But should not the *jnani* have *vairagya*, while it is desire that leads to conflict?

M.: Perfect *vairagya* is *Jnana*.

M. F.: How can we judge from the outside whether a man's *vairagya*, or surrender, is perfect or complete?

M.: Of perfect *vairagya* and *jnana*, who is there outside to judge?

M. F.: Instead of constantly pursuing the enquiry 'Who am I?' why not constantly ask 'Who are you?'

M.: Either enquiry that tends to still the mind is good. But 'Who am I?' is the shortest and most direct method. The others lead up to it.

—Condensed from the Sunday Times, January 12, 1936

Introduction to Guru Ramana — His Living Presence

By Swami Ramanananda Saraswati

Swami Ramanananda Saraswati, formerly Sri T. N. Venkataraman, President of Sri Ramanasramam, has provided the following Introduction to the recently-released Guru Ramana *video. On an elevated spot, with the majestic Arunachala Mountain ascending in the background, the Swami gives this modest summary of his own remarkable life, overlaid with archival photos, movies and music.*

IT has been fifty years since the *Maha Nirvana* of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. I had the rare, good fortune of being present on the night of April 14, 1950 when a brilliant star slowly sailed across the sky at the very moment the Maharshi took his last mortal breath.

Even more than this, my destiny has been uniquely connected to the Maharshi from my birth. My father, Nagasundaram Iyer, was the younger brother of Sri Bhagavan. Not long after I was born my

mother passed away, and when I was three years old my father took *sannyasa* and joined Sri Bhagavan and their mother Alagamma, at Skandasramam.

I was then lovingly raised by Bhagavan's sister, Alamelu, and her husband, Sri Pitchu Iyer. Since they had no children of their own, and none of my father's brothers had any issues, I became the only remaining descendant in my family's line.

As a child I was brought to Tiruvannamalai two or three times each year to see Bhagavan, my father, and Grandmother Alagamma when she was still living. Sometimes I was left in the care of Bhagavan and stayed overnight in the Ashrama. Like a mother, He would put me to sleep at night and then wake and wash me in the morning.

My life flowed on smoothly. I was married in 1929. All my seven children were brought to Bhagavan soon after their birth and He was pleased to bless them by giving them their names.

With Sri Bhagavan's consent and blessings, I was requested in 1938 to move to Tiruvannamalai and assist my father, Sri Niranjanananda Swami, in managing the Ashram.

After my father was absorbed in Sri Bhagavan in 1953, I succeeded him as the Ashram manager and President.

In all humility, I can say that Bhagavan has showered on me incredible grace and blessings from my birth to this very day.

In 1984, my wife Nagalakshmi attained the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan. I continued serving in the Ashram until 1994, at which time I resigned, handed over the Presidency of the Ashram to my eldest son, Sri V. S. Ramanan, and took the vows of *sannyasa*.

I now live a quiet life in the Ashram, remembering the holy presence of the Master and thanking Him for His innumerable blessings on me and all His devotees the world over.

After the Maharshi's *Maha Nirvana*, we published many reminiscences about Bhagavan written by devotees who moved closely with Him. These books are a valuable testimony to the ever-present, divine personality of the Master.

What you are now about to see is yet another testimony to the living presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi. You will hear from the lips of those who had the wonderful privilege of living under the watchful, loving eye of Sri Maharshi.

I have known these devotees since I came here in 1938. We were like one family, and Bhagavan was our father, mother, our everything.

He continues to attract sincere devotees to Him from all over the world as He lives, not only here in Sri Ramanasramam, but in the Hearts of all.

Vairagya or Dispassion

As the mind tends to go out, turn it inwards then and there. It goes out owing to the habit of looking for happiness outside oneself. But the knowledge that the external objects are not the cause of happiness will keep it in check. This is *vairagya* or dispassion. Only after perfect *vairagya* the mind becomes steady. —*Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi, No. 344*

Forty Verses in Praise of Sri Ramana

by Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni
Translated by Dr. Anil K. Sharma
(Continued from the last issue)

The "catvarimśat," daily recited before the Maharshi's tomb, is a heartfelt outpouring of devotion from a disciple of the highest order, to his guru, Sri Ramana. It is hoped that this word-by-word translation will enable devotees to gain a deeper insight into the Divine manifestion of the Maharshi as proclaimed by a unique seer of the 20th Century.

jaṭharaṁ samaye paripūrayatā
kaṭhinaṁ vratamadritaṭe caratā|
jhaṣaketanaśastra durāpahṛdā
kṛṣimātmavibodhavidau dadhatā||4||

jaṭharaṁ - stomach, *samaye* - at a (proper) time, *paripūrayatā* - filling, *kaṭhinaṁ* - hard, inflexible, *vratam* - vow, *adri* - mountain, *taṭe* - slope, side, *caratā* - living, *jhaṣaketana* - Lord of Love (Cupid), *śastra* - weapon, *durāpa* - hard to obtain, win over, *hṛdā* - heart, *kṛṣim* - leading, *ātma* - self, *vibodha* - knowledge, *vidau* - in the method, *dadhatā* - giving

He fills his stomach only at the proper time. Undertaking inflexible vows, he lives on the slope of the mountain (Arunachala). His heart is unable to be won over by the arrows of Cupid (the God of Love). He is leading his devotees, and giving them the method for Self-Knowledge (Atma Vichara).

bhavabhīkaravārinidhiṁ taratā
karatāmarasena supātravatā|
svadṛśā'dikaśītalakānti bhṛtā
bhyamaṅghrisarojajuṣāṁ haratā||5||

bhava - wordly existance, *bhīkara* - fear producing, *vārinidhiṁ* - ocean, *taratā* - crossing, *kara* - hand, *tāmarasena* - with lotus, *supātra* - bowl, *vatā* - having *svadṛśā* - own gaze, *adika* - unsurpassed, *śītala* - calming, *kānti* - bright, *bhṛtā* - to have, keep, *bhyam* - fear, *aṅghri* - foot, *saroja* - lotus, *juṣāṁ* - resort to, *haratā* - removing

He has crossed the fear-producing ocean of wordly life. He has hands as delicate as a lotus, which serve him as a bowl. His own gaze is unsurpassed in calmness and brightness, and he removes the fear of those who resort to his lotus feet.

namatām atibhaktimatāṁ nidhinā
ghanatāpa vidhūnanasannidhinā|
yatidharmatatiṁ paripālayatā
paritaśca tamo vinivāraytā||6||

namatām - of adoring, *atibhaktimatāṁ* - of true devotees, *nidhinā* - treasure, *ghana* - dense, *tāpa* - misery, *vidhūnana* - destroying, *sannidhinā* - presence, *yati* - ascetic, *dharma* - duty, *tatiṁ* - mass, group, *paripālayatā* - maintaining, *paritaś* - everywhere, *ca* - and, *tamo* - darkness, *vinivāraytā* - preventing

For adoring devotees, he is a storehouse of divine treasure. His presence destroys dense misery. He maintains the duties of the ascetic, and he is preventing darkness all around.

phaṇināyakavarṇya guṇaughabhṛtā
bhaṇitīḥ priyasatyahitā bhaṇatā|
bahumānavaśādayatā sukhitām
avamānatater avidūnavatā||7||

phaṇi nāyaka - leader of the serpents (*śeṣaḥ*), *varṇya* - able to be described, *guṇaugha* - flood of virtues, *bhṛtā* - having, *bhaṇitīḥ* - speech, words, *priya* - pleasing, *satya* - true, *hitā* - beneficial, wholesome, *bhaṇatā* - speaking, *bahumāna* - much respect, honor, *vaśād* - (by) influence, *ayatā* - not governed, *sukhitām* - happiness *avamāna* - dishonor, disrespect, *tater* - from the crowd, *avidūna* - without distress, *vatā* - having

Flooded with virtues that only Sesha, the leader of the serpents, can describe. He speaks words that are pleasing, beneficial and true. He is not governed by that happiness influenced by respect or honor (from others), nor does he have distress due to dishonor (from others).

(To be continued)

Letters and Comments

Willing to Die

I have an intense, burning desire to realize the Self/God. I have read the teachings of Ramana Maharshi. The main thing for me is still missing and what I cannot understand is:

1. What do I have to keep in mind during the day — while at work, at home, or anywhere — so that I can speed up the process of being awakened to the true nature of the Self/God?

2. To be awakened, I am willing to die. My only desire is to merge in God. Could you please advise me?

Castro Valley, California

Your burning desire to realize the truth will, if kept ablaze, undoubtedly take you to the destination. If you intensely turn inward and practice Vichara *during the times you are not required to be occupied externally, the inner peace experienced at these times will continue as an undercurrent during all your activities. If you do not experience that undercurrent at present, know that you must intensify your efforts and pray for God's grace.*

If you are "willing to die" in your pursuit of Truth, the attainment of the final experience is certain. Death does not mean the bodily death, for the body is already a living corpse. It is the death of the ego that qualifies us for the grace of realization. So continue, relentlessly, with dedication and devotion, according to your understanding, and the Maharshi will guide you to the final shore of freedom and joy.

Editor

Diet and Sleep

It has been over six months since we last corresponded. There have arisen many questions during this period. Some have been answered by reading various Maharshi-centered publications, while others either have become unimportant or neutralized by the simplicity and directness of the 'Who Am I?' process. Plus, there is no 'end game' around the knowledge that 'I am not the doer'. I do feel that I am in the 'jaws of a tiger', sometimes.

I meditate an hour in the morning, plus another hour of reading, and have a half-an-hour of meditation in the afternoon. There is the inward pull during the day that draws me more and more to the constant thought of 'Who Am I?'. I am not able to bring the self into the physically-centered Heart, nor do I necessarily have a sense that the ignorance of separation has diminished. I do, at times, feel a profound sense of having experienced Grace.

Maharshi said that *sattvic* food — described as of a mild vegetarian composition with no alcohol— is important. Is there any further information on this subject that one should be concerned with? I have a heart condition, so I do eat salmon twice-a-week for the Omega 3 oil. Other than that, I am pretty much a vegetarian, without using a lot of dairy products. I have given up wine, though the *Harvard Heart Letter* says that there is solid, scientific evidence that wine has a positive effect on heart-related illnesses.

The other 'house keeping' concern I have is the amount of sleep that was suggested in the book *The Technique of Maha Yoga,* by N. R. Narayana Aiyer. His recommendation of no more than four or five hours of sleep per night runs counter to the latest scientific studies on inadequate sleep and its effects on the immune system. I need a minimum of six or seven hours a night and would like eight but seldom get it. This author also had some other somewhat rigid precepts that I have not read as being those of the Maharshi. So, I find myself uncertain in an area that I am unqualified to make a judgement on, but do so anyway out of the aged habit of self preservation. What are your thoughts on this and any of the above?

I don't know that being in a community of Maharshi devotees would make the path any less difficult, but being alone is where I am and so it must be perfect. But, it would be nice to...

Roseburg, Oregon

Thank you for your thoughtful letter. We are encouraged by it. And, yes, I am sure you have been

caught in the 'tiger's jaws'. Major Allan Chadwick wrote a nice poem on this, titled, "Will You Not Let Me Go?" We printed it in the first Maharshi *newsletter in 1991.*

Bhagavan recommended sattvic *food in moderate quantities. To my knowledge, he did not recommend fasting to devotees. He has said that all nutritional requirements can be found in a vegetarian diet.*

Bhagavan, of course, slept very little. He noted that sleep was for the mind, not for the body, which can recuperate while taking rest, remaining awake. Often a very active mind may require more sleep, whereas a tranquil mind may require less. No two individuals will be alike, and I do not believe there is a hard and fast rule on the number of hours we should sleep every night. Bhagavan did say that we should engage in Self-enquiry while awake. That appears, though indirectly, to be his most important teaching in regards to sleep.

We are always alone, even while with others. If one can carry on one's sadhana *intensely while alone it is good. To live in a community of seriously-practicing aspirants is also helpful, but hard to find. We all have to do what we can where we are. That is most important.*

Editor

The Living Presence and Grace of Bhagavan

Thank you very, very much for sending me the new video on Bhagavan. As I mentioned on the voice-mail message I left for you this afternoon, I have a rather interesting tale to tell about this video.

When the release and availability of the video was announced in the most recent newsletter, I thought of purchasing it by calling Arunachala Ashrama and having it mailed to me. Then, however, I felt that I might get it personally when I visited the Ashrama on an upcoming business trip to the New York City area. The trip actually was to New Jersey and my business meetings were planned for June 5th, and I had scheduled my return flight from Newark Airport for 4 p.m. on June 6th. That, I thought, might allow me sufficient time to visit Arunachala Ashrama on the morning of June 6th.

My business meetings took place as planned yesterday. For a number of reasons, however, my visit to Arunachala Ashrama turned out not to be possible and I actually took an earlier flight this morning which had me home by 2 p.m.

When I pulled into my driveway this afternoon, I decided to check the mail before going into the house. And, lo and behold, I saw the parcel from Arunachala Ashrama and I immediately knew exactly what the contents were! [The video had been sent to him as a gift.]

As I retrieved your parcel from the mailbox, I thought that even though I could not visit Bhagavan, He came to me! I felt truly blessed by this expression of His Grace.

It further amazed me that I should receive this video on the exact day that I had thought I would visit Arunachala Ashrama to get it but could not do so; and then to find it in my mailbox just as I am returning home from that very same trip. This truly is an actual demonstration of the Living Presence and Grace of Bhagavan!

Thank you for thinking of me and sending me the new video, "Guru Ramana: His Living Presence." Thank you for being an instrument of His Grace.

Rohit Vaidya, Florida

THE MAHARSHI is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil Sharma and distributed in North America by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. The newsletter is also delivered attached to an e-mail as a PDF. Send your request to "ashrama@aol.com". This issue and all back issues are available at "http//www.arunachala.org". Books, videos and audio CDs on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found on this Website.

The Mahakumbhabhishekam of the Arunachaleswara Temple

ON June 27 about two million pilgrims will witness a rare spectacle in Tiruvannamalai. After extensive and costly renovations of the Arunachala Temple, the sacred purificatory ceremony, a ten-day *Mahakumbhabhishekam*, will culminate on June 27.

With the assistance of devotees from America and elsewhere, Sri Ramanasramam took on some of the renovations — the Patala Lingam and the Thousand-Pillared Mantapam.

The Temple of Arunachala is spread over a twenty-five acre area and is one of the biggest and most famous in all of India. With the advent of Bhagavan Sri Ramana on September 1, 1896 and his total identification with Arunachala, the hill and temple, its renown has spread over the continents as the traditional and ever-shining symbol of transcendental awareness.

During the ceremony, pots of holy *tirthas* (water) are worshipped with 108 *homas* and *archanas,* and then the holy waters are poured over the tops of the main temple towers and also in the sanctum sanctorum. A sea of pilgrims will fill the temple, the streets, and will blanket the hill to view the final pouring of the holy waters on top of the temple towers. To witness this is considered highly auspicious and meritorious. There will be full-throated chants of 'Annamalaiku Haro Hara' by hundreds of thousands of devotees, while the Vedas and Tamil hymns from the *Tevaram* and *Thiruvachakam* are recited.

Within our lifetime a *Mahakumbhabhishekam* was done only once before in 1976. It was also performed in 1903. This event will, no doubt, be an unforgettable experience for many.

Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs and meditation have been going on in a few places near large cities. Some of them are weekly, others monthly. If you would like to attend any of these and meet followers of Sri Ramana Maharshi in your area, please call or write for more information.

Boston Area — David & Anna Klegon (617-928-1487 /dklegon@rcn.com)

Detroit, Ann Arbor Area — Prashanth & Shobana (734-327-0109 / prashvis@hotmail.com)

Atlanta Area — Mangalam Kalyanam (706-846-5620 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

Washington, D.C. Area — Prakash & Mamtha Adiseshan (703-502-4892 / adiseshan@worldnet.att.net)

Miami, Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Rubinson (954-755-4758 / Arunahill@aol.com)

San Francisco Area — Swaminathan & Sangeeta (510-324-1160 / Nachiketas@hotmail.com)

Toronto, Canada — Krishen & Padma Sastri (905-849-6005 / psastri@hotmail.com)